Building Extension’s Capacity to Work Across Difference

The Washington State University Extension (WSUE) Navigating Difference: Cultural Competency Training is designed to assist Extension professionals expand their skills in working with diverse audiences. The overarching goals for the training are to assist participants to:

- Become more aware of their own personal and organizational cultures
- Examine how their personal and organizational cultures affect their ability to work across difference in both negative and positive ways
- Build skills to increase competencies as they work with others who are different from them

Navigating Difference borrows from a variety of approaches to diversity work. The training is based on the premise that becoming culturally competent is a developmental process. Participants gain cultural competency skills by engaging in experiences that challenge their assumptions and patterns of interacting with others.

Navigating Difference is an 18 hour training based on the following WSU Extension Cultural Competencies:

- Cultural Awareness
- Cultural Understanding
- Cultural Knowledge
- Cultural Interaction
- Cultural Sensitivity

Training modules based on the competencies are each from two to four hours long. Sessions can be offered in an intensive three-day format, or over a period of months with opportunities for application between modules.

Describing Outcomes for Culturally Competent Professionals

What does it mean for professionals to be “culturally competent”? WSU Extension has articulated three outcomes and related indicators to assess the effectiveness of its professional development around diversity issues.

Culturally competent professionals:

- Engage in culturally diverse settings, initiatives and programs.
  
  Indicators:
  - Participate in opportunities to increase intercultural competence in specific job-related contexts.
  - Partner with diverse organizations through board/committee membership, joint sponsorship of events or other forms of collaboration.
  - Serve on diversity-related committees for Extension, the university or the community.
  - Encourage, support and model cultural competencies among colleagues, staff and volunteers.

- Integrate cultural competencies in the planning, implementation and evaluation of programming.
  
  Indicators:
  - Engage members of diverse communities in determining program design and content.
  - Incorporate diversity outcomes and activities into Plans of Work.
  - Adapt recruitment, marketing and delivery strategies to effectively reach diverse audiences.
  - Utilize evaluation approaches and methods that effectively measure change with diverse learners.

- Practice strategies for successful intercultural communication in professional settings.
  
  Indicators:
  - Adapt personal communication style and behaviors to be effective in variety of cultural situations and settings.
  - Recognize and address conflict arising from cultural differences.
  - Model and share best practices for communicating across differences.

Evaluation Methods

Sample
- 42 participants from two trainings
- These were pilot surveys; demographics not collected

Measures
- 12 items designed to assess objectives of the training; for example:
  - “I recognize the different cultural styles of dealing with conflict”
  - “I understand how privilege may affect my work with people from cultures different from my own.”
  - “I have a framework to help me understand cultural differences”
- Items rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree)

Procedure
- Pretest at the beginning of the workshop
- Posttest at the end of the workshop

Evaluation Results

Change from pretest to posttest measured with paired t-tests

Significant change (p < .01) on all items but 2:

- Cultural sensitivity is something you either have or you don’t
- Cultural sensitivity can be developed

Items that showed greatest change were:

- Item 1: I have a framework to help me understand cultural differences
- Item 2: I can identify strategies to work with cultural guides to better inform my program planning and implementation
- Item 3: I understand the barriers to intercultural communications
- Item 4: I have strategies for effective intercultural communications
- Item 5: I recognize the different cultural styles of dealing with conflict

The intent of the Navigating Difference training is to prepare Extension professionals to work effectively across many dimensions of diversity.